

NEWS FROM THE MONTANA LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

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Contact: Sue O'Connell, Research Analyst, Legislative Services, 406-444-3597

Gayle Shirley, Legislative Information Officer, 406-444-2957

Lawmakers to Hear from Emergency Medical Service Providers

Consumer Access to Health Care Also to Be Discussed

HELENA -- Emergency medical services (EMS) providers from across Montana will share their concerns about the state of emergency care at a Nov. 16 meeting of an interim committee of the Montana Legislature.

The meeting will begin at 8 a.m. in Room 102 of the Capitol in Helena. The presentation is part of an ongoing study focusing on ways to ensure that local emergency medical services remain strong.

The Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Committee also will explore ideas for improving the way consumers access health care, both from price and quality perspectives. And it will consider the scope of a study of Montana's mental health system.

The bipartisan committee meets between legislative sessions to monitor health and human service issues and conduct studies approved by the Legislature.

EMS providers will give lawmakers an overview of how their services operate and will discuss the issues they face in providing services. Speakers invited to present their views are:

- Teresia Moore, Roosevelt Medical Center Ambulance, Culbertson;
- Mike McGree, A-1 Ambulance Service, Butte;
- Don Whalen, Missoula Emergency Service, Inc.;
- Joleen Weatherwax, Blackfeet Ambulance Service, Browning;
- Delbert Abbey, Philipsburg Volunteer Ambulance Association;
- Scott Mitchell, Wheatland Memorial Hospital, Harlowton; and
- John Bleicher, St. Patrick's Hospital, Missoula.

Committee members also plan to look at ways to provide consumers with more information on prices for health-care services, as well as quality ratings for doctors and hospitals. Physicians, insurers, and representatives of hospitals and surgical centers will discuss whether and how to make that information more widely available.

The interim committee also will review request for bids from consulting firms to conduct a study of the needs of the state's mental health system. The 2007 Legislature appropriated \$200,000 for the study. The study will seek to identify gaps in existing mental health services, determine

whether additional funding resources exist, and look for ways to improve collaboration among local, state, federal, and private agencies.

The public will have a chance to comment on each of the studies, as well as any other health and human services issues for which the committee has jurisdiction.

A meeting agenda and other meeting materials are available on the legislative Web site at www.leg.mt.gov. Click on Committees, then Interim, and then the committee name.

Anyone interested in receiving e-mail notification of the activities of the interim committee may sign up at http://leg.mt.gov/css/email_logon.asp. For more information about the meeting, contact the Legislative Information Office at 444-2957.

Members of the committee are Sens. Carol Juneau, Rick Laible, Terry Murphy, and Dan Weinberg and Reps. Edith Clark, Ernie Dutton, Teresa Henry, and Diane Sands.

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News Editors and Directors: The committee meeting will be audio-streamed live via the Internet. You can listen to the study presentations by going to the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee Web page and clicking on the "Listen Live" link for the Nov. 16 meeting. The link becomes active when the meeting begins.